

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

**Remarks on Presenting Posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor to
Sergeant First Class Jared C. Monti**

September 17, 2009

Please be seated. Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House.

Of all the privileges of serving as President, there's no greater honor than serving as Commander in Chief of the finest military that the world has ever known. And of all the military decorations that a President and a nation can bestow, there is none higher than the Medal of Honor.

It has been nearly 150 years since our Nation first presented this medal for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. And in those nearly 150 years—through Civil War and two World Wars, Korea and Vietnam, Desert Storm and Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq, and countless battles in between—tens of millions of Americans have worn the uniform. But fewer than 3,500 have been recognized with the Medal of Honor. And in our time, these remarkable Americans are literally one in a million. And today we recognize another: Sergeant First Class Jared C. Monti.

The Medal of Honor reflects the admiration and gratitude of the Nation. So we are joined by Members of Congress, including from Sergeant Monti's home State of Massachusetts Senator John Kerry and Congressman Barney Frank. We're joined by our Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, and leaders from across the Armed Forces.

We are joined by the leaders of the Army to which Sergeant Monti dedicated his life: Secretary Pete Geren; our incoming Secretary—confirmed by the Senate last night—John McHugh; Chief of Staff General George Casey; Sergeant Major of the Army Ken Preston; and Jared's fellow soldiers and commanders from the legendary 10th Mountain Division. And we are joined by those who now welcome Sergeant Monti into their storied ranks, members of the Medal of Honor Society.

But today is not about high officials and those with stars on their shoulders. It's a celebration of a young soldier and those who loved him, who made him into the man he was and who join us today: his mother Janet; his father Paul; his brother Tim; and his sister Niccole—and from his grandmother Marjorie to his 6 year old niece Carys and cousins and aunts and uncles from across America—more than 120 proud family and friends.

Duty, honor, country, service, sacrifice, heroism; these are words of weight. But as people—as a people and as a culture, we often invoke them lightly. We toss them around freely. But do we really grasp the meaning of these values? Do we truly understand the nature of these virtues, to serve and to sacrifice? Jared Monti knew. The Monti family knows. And they know that the actions we honor today were not a passing moment of courage. They were the culmination of a life of character and commitment.

There was Jared's compassion. He was the kid at school who, upon seeing a student eating lunch alone, would walk over and befriend him. He was the teenager who cut down a spruce tree in his yard so a single mom in town would have a Christmas tree for her children. He even bought the ornaments and the presents. He was the soldier in Afghanistan who received care

packages, including fresh clothes, and gave them away to Afghan children who needed them more.

There was Jared's perseverance. Cut from the high school basketball team, he came back next year, and the next year, and the next year—three times—finally making varsity and outscoring some of the top players. Told he was too young for the military, he joined the National Guard's delayed entry program as a junior in high school. And that summer, while other kids were at the beach, Jared was doing drills.

There was Jared's strength and skill. The championship wrestler and triathlete who went off to basic training, just 18 years old, and then served with distinction as a forward observer, with the heavy responsibility of calling in air strikes. He returned from his first tour in Afghanistan highly decorated, including a Bronze Star and Army Commendation Medal for Valor.

And there was Jared's deep and abiding love for his fellow soldiers. Maybe it came from his mom, who was a nurse; maybe it came from his dad, a teacher. Guided by the lessons he learned at home, Jared became the consummate NCO, the noncommissioned officer caring for his soldiers and teaching his troops. He called them his "boys." And although, obviously, he was still young himself, some of them called him "grandpa." [*Laughter*]

Compassion, perseverance, strength, a love for his fellow soldiers; those are the values that defined Jared Monti's life and the values he displayed in the actions that we recognize here today.

It was June 21, 2006, in the remotest northeast of Afghanistan, near the border with Pakistan. Sergeant Monti was a team leader on a 16-man patrol. They'd been on the move for 3 days, down dirt roads, sloshing through rivers, hiking up steep mountain trails, their heavy gear on their backs, moving at night and in the early morning to avoid the scorching 100-degree heat. Their mission: to keep watch on the valley down below in advance of an operation to clear the area of militants.

Those who were there remember that evening on the mountain, a rocky ridge not much bigger than this room. Some were standing guard, knowing they had been spotted by a man in the valley. Some were passing out MREs and water. There was talk of home and plans for leave. Jared was overheard remembering his time serving in Korea. Then, just before dark, there was a shuffle of feet in the woods. And that's when the tree line exploded in a wall of fire.

One member of the patrol said it was "like thousands of rifles crackling." Bullets and heavy machine gunfire ricocheting across the rocks; rocket-propelled grenades raining down; fire so intense that weapons were shot right out of their hands. Within minutes, one soldier was killed; another was wounded. Everyone dove for cover—behind a tree, a rock, a stone wall. This patrol of 16 men was facing a force of some 50 fighters. Outnumbered, the risk was real. They might be overrun. And they may—might not make it out alive.

And that's when Jared Monti did what he was trained to do. With the enemy advancing, so close they could hear their voices, he got on his radio and started calling in artillery. When the enemy tried to flank them, he grabbed a gun and drove them back. And when they came back again, he tossed a grenade and drove them back again. And when these American soldiers saw one of their own wounded, lying in the open, some 20 yards away, exposed to the approaching enemy, Jared Monti did something no amount of training can instill. His patrol leader said he'd go, but Jared said, "No, he is my soldier. I'm going to get him."

It was written long ago that "the bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet, notwithstanding, go out to meet it." Jared Monti saw the danger before him. And he went out to meet it.

He handed off his radio. He tightened his chin strap. And with his men providing cover, Jared rose and started to run into all those incoming bullets, into all those rockets. Upon seeing Jared, the enemy in the woods unleashed a firestorm. He moved low and fast, yard after yard, then dove behind a stone wall.

A moment later, he rose again. And again, they fired everything they had at him, forcing him back. Faced with overwhelming enemy fire, Jared could have stayed where he was, behind that wall. But that was not the kind of soldier Jared Monti was. He embodied that creed all soldiers strive to meet: "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade." And so, for a third time, he rose. For a third time, he ran toward his fallen comrade. Said his patrol leader, it "was the bravest thing I had ever seen a soldier do."

They say it was a rocket-propelled grenade; that Jared made it within a few yards of his wounded soldier. They say that his final words, there on that ridge far from home, were of his faith and his family: "I've made peace with God. Tell my family that I love them."

And then, as the artillery that Jared had called in came down, the enemy fire slowed, then stopped. The patrol had defeated the attack. They had held on, but not without a price. By the end of the night, Jared and three others, including the soldier he died trying to save, had given their lives.

I'm told that Jared was a very humble guy, that he would have been uncomfortable with all this attention, that he'd say he was just doing his job, and that he'd want to share this moment with others who were there that day. And so, as Jared would have wanted, we also pay tribute to those who fell alongside him: Staff Sergeant Patrick Lybert; Private First Class Brian Bradbury; Staff Sergeant Heathe Craig.

And we honor all the soldiers he loved and who loved him back, among them noncommissioned officers who remind us why the Army has designated this "The Year of the NCO" in honor of all those sergeants who are the backbone of America's Army. They are Jared's friends and fellow soldiers watching this ceremony today in Afghanistan. They are the soldiers who this morning held their own ceremony on an Afghan mountain at the post that now bears his name: Combat Outpost Monti. And they are his "boys," surviving members of Jared's patrol from the 10th Mountain Division who are here with us today. And I would ask them all to please stand.

Like Jared, these soldiers know the meaning of duty and of honor, of country. Like Jared, they remind us all that the price of freedom is great. And by their deeds, they challenge every American to ask this question: What can we do to be better citizens? What can we do to be worthy of such service and such sacrifice?

Sergeant First Class Jared C. Monti, in his proud hometown of Raynham, his name graces streets and scholarships. Across a grateful nation, it graces parks and military posts. From this day forward, it will grace the memorials to our Medal of Honor heroes. And this week, when Jared Monti would have celebrated his 34th birthday, we know that his name and legacy will live forever and shine brightest in the hearts of his family and friends who will love him always.

May God bless Jared Monti, and may He comfort the entire Monti family. And may God bless the United States of America.

Janet, Paul, would you please join me at the podium for the reading of the citation?

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Secretary of the Army Preston M. "Pete" Geren III; Secretary of the Army John M. McHugh; and SFC Christopher M. Cunningham, USA. Following the President's remarks, Lt. Col. Gina C. Humble, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President, read the citation.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Congressional Medal of Honor :: Monti, SFC Jared C., posthumous award to.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Casey, George W., Jr.; Cunningham, Christopher M.; Frank, Barney; Gates, Robert M.; Geren, Preston M. "Pete," III; Kerry, John F.; McHugh, John M.; Monti, Carys E.; Monti, Janet E.; Monti, Niccole T.; Monti, Paul; Monti, Timothy J.; Mullen, Michael G.; Preston, Kenneth. O.; Ross, Marjorie.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Insurgency and terrorist attacks; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Casualties; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Service and dedication; Decorations, medals, and awards : Congressional Medal of Honor.

DCPD Number: DCPD200900722.